

Remember How He Needed Us? by pennywife

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Summary:

Richie may not hold you the way that you want to be held, but you'd die out there if he ever set you free.

1. Pretty Little Dove

Author's Note:

Ahoy! Triggering content ahead! Don't skip these tags, folks! Cheating, cosmetic surgery, miscarriage, alcoholism, and self-harm are going to play major themes in this fic and if you hated my other reader-characters then boy are you not gonna like this one lmao! Everyone in this fic is gonna be extremely selfish and flawed because daz what I like to write!

This is your second glass of wine before the sun is even up, and if you didn't have to drive soon you'd have already emptied the bottle. Richie says he doesn't like it when you drink this much during the day, but the truth of it is that he doesn't actually care. All you really are to him is just another punchline, a thing that's sure to draw out laughs at the end of one of his shows. You're the alcoholic wife who cries at night and burns through all of his money; but he'll never once make an effort to try and stop you. As long as you're still thin, and beautiful, and lucid enough to hold him by the crook of his arm when he takes you outside; Richie couldn't care less what you have to do to fill up your days.

You're supposed to meet Stacy in twenty minutes. You should be gathering up your things and picking out your favorite handle of vodka to take along with you, but all you've done for the past hour is stare at yourself in the mirror. Hem of your dress clenched tight between your teeth, you stand and you bore at your still-swollen stomach until it feels like your corneas are going to open up and bleed down over your cheeks. What was once toned and pristine is now littered with angry violet stripes, and no matter how hard you squint you can't seem to make them go away.

It's alright though. By tomorrow morning you'll be as good as new, like a perfect doll ripped right out of the box. The doctors will cut you hip bone to hip bone, and once you're back to the way that you were you'll have a pretty white scar to obsess about in the mornings instead of skin that ripped when it couldn't be stretched any further.

Five months— that was it. Your mother carried two pregnancies to term, and neither of them left behind a single fucking *mark*.

Richie says he doesn't mind them, but you don't really think that that's true. He never wraps his arms around your waist like he used to, never runs his tongue up between your breasts and fucks you like he did in the beginning. A bolt of anger strikes at your heart, blistering hot, just another emotion you can't seem to understand and you bite yourself on the inside of your wrists so that Richie can't see; hard enough to hurt, but never enough that it leaves a scar.

He hardly ever even touches you at all anymore, and the thought of him leaving you only makes that gaping pit in your heart grow blacker every day. You wonder who he thinks about when he closes his eyes, and you torture yourself over the crowds of women who throw themselves at his feet. He's just so goddamn *perfect*, the celebrity husband that a girl like you could have only ever dreamed about having before. You just want him to hold you again, the way that he used to when you were perfect too. You want him to take you into his strong pale arms, and tell you that he isn't going to leave you for someone a little more beautiful.

A tear stings at the inner corner of your eye, sadness so loud it sounds like the rushing of water against your eardrums. He's still asleep— right now, back in the bedroom upstairs. You could cancel your plans and curl up to his side beneath the silk of your sheets, begging him not to scoff and turn you away again. You could scream if you remembered how. You could empty your lungs and tell him that this is a torture you wouldn't wish on *anyone* who knows what it feels like to be so in love it makes them vomit, and he'd stare at you behind the frames of his glasses as if you were speaking another language. It doesn't work. It never works. It never works and you'll never get sick enough of it to leave. You're a pretty little dove in an opulent cage who cannot peck the hand who feeds her. Richie may not hold you the way that you want to be held, but you'd die out there if he ever set you free.

The tips of your nails drag over your hips when you pull your dress back down to hide your body. A dampened stain marks the place where it'd been bitten in your mouth, a darker gray than the rest of the fabric, but there's not enough time to dry it before you leave. You

dump the remnants of your glass down into the sink and stuff it deep into the cabinet below, and head back out into the blinding light of the foyer.

You always read about the healing power of light, and how sterility and cleanliness somehow make you a better person than everyone else, but it doesn't feel right anymore. The virginal white of your walls has become nauseating, a sore to the eyes before you pull your sunglasses down over your face to shield them. Two years you and your husband have been in this house, and if you left right now there wouldn't be a single sign that you were ever really even here.

A steady vibration comes to life in your purse, probably just a call from Stacy to bitch about how late you are already. You don't pick up because you don't care enough to, but were it not for you digging around between the silk-lined leather you wouldn't have realized you'd forgotten your keys.

They must still be upstairs, resting back on the nightstand by your side of the bed. You hiss and curse at the haze of the wine for making you so forgetful, and pray to God that Richie won't wake up to the clacking of your heels against the marble of the steps. The last thing you need right now is another reason for him to resent you. That's why when you finally turn the knob of the master bedroom's door, you do it as quietly as you've ever done anything in your life.

Your father died when you were just a child, a drunken car-accident that you were never allowed to ask about. A little girl at school told you his body had been obliterated by the force of the crash, that his bones had crumpled like eggshells and that is why you weren't able to have an open casket at the funeral; but you remember enough about when he was alive to wipe out the horror of his death. You remember Sunday mornings and Thanksgiving dinners, and you even remember that there was once a night when you both shared the same exact dream. It had been at an aquarium the two of you had never been to, and when you'd woken up you could both recall the conversations you had together while you were there. It was almost like magic, like something you'd swear was a lie if it hadn't happened to you; but you're as sure as you are every other memory you have with him that that one was real.

It's for this reason that when you see the clown bracketing Richie's body on his hands and knees at the end of the bed, you're certain that's what has to be happening again now. This is only a nightmare, one you've managed to walk yourself inside of without any intent of doing so.

An inhuman tongue slithers out from behind sickly yellowed teeth to trace a vein in your husband's throat, dripping wet when Richie drops the side of his face down onto the bed to rest. You know the mouth that it belongs to without ever having seen it before, as if all those stories of a clown who'd frightened him as a child had been sewn into your head without your permission, as if you'd lived it yourself instead of all of his friends in those days back in Derry. The talons on its hands that pierce into soft pink flesh, the black of its eyelids when it sounds out a purr; you've seen them before, you must have.

The mattress squeaks. It almost sounds like dozens of tiny rats, filling up your eardrums with their chittering until you can't even remember the sound of your own thoughts. The clown moves into your husband, fucking him slowly, taking him in a way that you're certain cannot be real. This is all just another practice in self-torture, a trap set by your own conscious to watch you squirm and wither in pain.

This is not really happening. You are not really here.

Time passes like a glacier through saltwater, and no matter how hard you fight it you cannot seem to try and look away. Every muscle in your body has turned to rusted iron. Vomit sours your stomach, blood at the roof of your mouth; but you stay and you stand and you watch. Through the surrealism you fight for reason, and your hands come up empty each time you try. It makes no sense in this world for the love of your life to be on his hands and knees for the thing that wakes him in the night screaming, and you don't know what to do with any of this besides wait for it to be over.

The cotton over the clown's hands, which had only a moment ago been taloned and dark, slide up and down the curve of Richie's back. It's close now; you can see it in the way its jaw slackens, in the way its thrusts turn so languid and deep. Your husband's eyes are hidden

by his curls, but you're sure that if they weren't you'd see them squeezed tight together in ecstasy. He fists his cock in his hand until he's spilling onto the sheets, until the clown halts and digs its nails so deep into his sides that blood drips from the wounds. The scent hits your nostrils like a razor, the metal tang of iron on your tongue. It fills up your eyes, until you can't even move, can't even breathe; and you realize, with horror, that this was never really a dream at all.

"Oh my God." You whimper, and the voice that comes out of you doesn't sound like your own. "Oh— Oh my God this is— This is real."

The clown stops. It's like all the air has been sucked out of the room, leaving nothing behind but horror and cold. It crumples in on itself before it turns its head to look at you through the gap in the doorway, and you watch the slit of its pupils shrink when it registers your presence. An animal, you think, as its face twists up with fury and alarm. An animal, or maybe even a monster; but it slips out of your husband when he rips himself away as if it's been here a thousand times before. A lover, you realize, and the thought makes you sick.

Lovers, losers, lovers.

Richie rips the blankets off to cover himself and lunges off of the bed, reaching out to you and spilling out an unending string of, "I love you I'm sorry I can explain I love you this isn't what it looks like I love you I love you oh God Pennywise this isn't I can just—"

The curve of your spine slams into the hallway behind you, knocking down a painting from the force of it. Adrenaline sizzles in your veins, turning your blood to ash with every deafening beat of your heart. Not once does Pennywise move an inch from where it crouches at the foot of the mattress, but it isn't the clown you're running away from when you flee for the stairs.

Terror fuels you. Terror, and the overwhelming urge to break free from this house. You're rushing down the steps so fast that you're sure you're going to fall, going to trip and break your neck just trying to get out through the front door. The sound of Richie rushing after you slows to a stop, and in the distance you can hear an inhuman

voice hissing something that you can't understand.

Perhaps it's telling him to kill you to keep you from telling anyone else about what you've seen.

Perhaps it's telling him you're not worth running after anyway.

2. Always Vodka

Summary for the Chapter:

You run to meet your best friend, Stacy, to try and temporarily escape the horror of what you've just seen.

Notes for the Chapter:

Hey what's up guys here's the part where I try and warn you about stuff so you don't get too blindsided while reading. Reader is... an odd woman. Her way of thinking and her actions are really irrational, especially here; and her body-issues, self-harm, and **ESPECIALLY** her alcoholism are major themes here. Unhealthy marriages and cheating are discussed—There's also an OC in this chapter who is dealing with some of the things that Reader is as well. It can be triggering to read about disturbing events/behaviors from the eyes of a character who normalizes these things, so that's why this is getting so longwinded. Richie's sexual orientation is also briefly discussed/worried over, and there's honestly probably a lot more triggering stuff that I'm completely forgetting to warn you about... Really just wanna remind you that this is a strange and extremely dark fic, and you really don't have to read this if it isn't your cup of tea.

You've never much minded the taste of blood.

There are so many things in this world that have always wanted to draw it out from you, wanted to see it run red when you stood in their way. The fangs from the dog Richie bought you last spring, a metal tray to the nose when you just couldn't find a way to fit in with the girls at your school. All those scalpels and razors and saline-filled syringes, asphalt to the hands and knees and teeth clamped down hard at the base of your thumb. The pain cuts through the humiliation like a scythe through tall grass, and just like always, you

don't let go until you taste the iron of it again on your tongue.

Just keep thinking about blood, and maybe then you'll stop seeing the way Richie's eyes had fluttered when that thing rutted into him from behind.

"Idiot!" You curse yourself, and it strikes you again, the memory so disturbing it hits you like a blow to the spine; and for a brief moment you decide you want to kill it. You want to reach into its chest and snuff out the light of its soul in your hand like the dying of a star, but you know that you can't, and even just picturing its face in your head has you running faster on the sidewalk with your forearms pulled tight towards your chest. In every single windowpane of every store you flee past, you expect to see the reflection of its jackal mouth snarling after you— hunting you down like prey in the streets.

"It feeds on your fear," Richie had told you, once when these were all just stories and nightmares from a life before he left Maine. "It knows what you're afraid of, more than anything else, and it... *uses* those fears to try and hurt you."

A beast that subsists on terror and flesh; tiny voices crying out for their mothers beneath the earth. There isn't much in this world that frightens you to your core, but when that monster slithered into your home it wasn't your fear it had ravaged. It was your *love*.

That vile and venomous creature from a world beyond your own; does it love him like you do? Is it even capable of doing so? Does it even know *how*?

You cannot imagine how any of this could have started, how such a twisted affair could have ever come to be. The Richard you married may not have been the man you'd fallen in love with, but he certainly would have never done *this*. All that talk of a family and children of your own, and now he beds a monster who eats of their flesh and drinks of their blood like wine.

The sun dips behind a stray cloud as you veer around the corner. The fading of the light makes your throat feel dry and tight, anxiety clawing at your chest. You remember the rules, and know well the unfathomable extent of what the clown is able to do, and it's for this

reason that you can't help but wonder if the sudden darkening of the sky is a warning. What you uncovered, the secret you witnessed that you were never meant to know; would it not do it well to simply just kill you? To slaughter you, so that you'll never be able to interfere with it again?

And what of Richie? He hasn't called you, isn't running after you down the streets and begging you not to go. Is he on his way to find you, to rip you back by the bend if your arm and assure you it all was a dream? Is he back at your home, waiting patiently for you to come running back into his repentant arms? Lastly, though the thought doesn't feel quite like your own when it races across the width of your mind; *is he busy letting Pennywise fuck him again?*

Vile! Those words sour your stomach, have you choking down on a gag as you cross through the parking lot towards the rear end of Stacy's luxurious car. They all feel filthy, foreign; like a bruise at the back of your head that you can't for the life of you ever remember getting. The wine from this morning does nothing to dull the brunt of it, and thus, you have something more urgent to worry about now than your famous husband breaking his vows.

Stacy hardly even glances at you when you pull open the handle to the passenger-side door. Her eyes are glued to the screen of her phone, her legs pulled up into a w-shape beside herself on either side of the steering wheel. There's an unopened bottle of Grey Goose in her hands, but under the scent of fresh leather and floral perfume, you can tell she's already been drinking something else since long before you even left your house.

The lock-button to her phone clicks under her thumb, and at last she shifts towards you to quirk an immaculately-plucked brow.

"You uh, gonna get in here, or...?"

Stacy trails off with the drumming of her nails on the steering wheel, and when her eyes catch the fresh bite-wound on your hand she doesn't say a word. She simply frowns for a moment, and instead turns her attention back on the liquid sloshing back and forth behind the glass of the bottle.

You'd like nothing more than to drop to your knees out in the parking lot and scream until your lungs turn black with mourning, but the desperate need for more liquor deafens the horror of what you'd witnessed back inside of your home. It takes you a moment to climb up into the seat with your buckling limbs, but at last you make it inside. Stacy takes her sweet time in pressing open the seal beneath the cap, and in your bitter impatience you all but rip it away from her the moment she's done.

Vodka; always vodka. You think by now you're ruined with it, that it runs through your veins like the drugs they'll pump you full of tomorrow whenever it's time. It's always there in the back of your head like a filthy secret you've never been able to hide, and when at long last you feel the sting of it burn at the back of your throat you swear to god it tastes more like home than anywhere else in Southern California.

Neither you nor Stacy say a single word to each other when you pass the bottle right back into her hand. You're both too focused on the race to get drunk before bothering to try and socialize with each other now, and for a brief moment you try and count the times you've ever hung out together that didn't end in vomit or in tears. Three years you've called Stacy your best and only friend, and not once do you think you've ever seen each other sober.

It isn't natural; this relationship you've made together. It isn't laced with niceties and societal norms, but rather built on shared pain and the innate need to let go, and you suppose that's the reason you both enjoy it so. Stacy gets a reprieve from the role of the aristocratic wife her husband has carved her to be, and in turn you get the chance to be around someone who doesn't look at you like there's something profoundly broken inside of you. You're just two human beings, sitting in a car, trying to escape whatever it is that the both of you came to forget.

"You're not dressed for work." You comment, when at last the warmth of a buzz returns to blanket around your mind. "Did you finally tell Mark that you quit?"

Stacy scoffs and rolls her eyes, as if you were a fool to even bother to ask.

You'd assumed that by now she'd have given up going this far to keep up the charade, all these weeks of lying to her husband after quitting in a rage. He's always tracking her phone to see where she is, making sure she's really here at her job instead of running around with you or other men, and it doesn't occur to you until just now how absurd all of that actually sounds. It's just the way things have always been; this routine of control and infantilization as natural to you now as the earth beneath your feet.

Silence falls over the space of the vehicle, all save for the soft rumbling of the engine and Stacy hissing after another drink. You catch yourself staring at her clothes, the ones you'd commented on just a moment ago. The elastic band of her tights cuts deep into the ample flesh of her hips, and when she hooks her thumb inside to let them loose you can see the angry red line they've left behind. She pulls them up higher over her waist, smoothing out the wrinkles in the expensive fabric by running her hands up and down over her sides. She sees you looking, watching; you don't care to hide it. Her body is *perfect*, *The Birth of Venus* before your eyes, and you can see it in her face she feels proud. The mark on *her* belly will fade away in minutes, while yours will be with you for the rest of your natural life.

"Fuck you." You grumble, and Stacy lets out a snort of air in amusement.

"Oh, shut up. I'd take looking like you any day over me— Muscle separation, stretch-marks, and all."

She smirks against the mouth of the bottle and steals a glance through the corner of her eye. Her tanned cheeks are flushed and rosy, and you see it in the way her pupils sparkle when she forces herself to look back at the side of the building ahead, that she's already far more gone than you. A sudden cloud of darkness passes over her delicate face, and you watch her wilt like a flower before your eyes.

A minute passes, before she says anything. All the while you can see the thought forming in her mind, watching curiously as her brows twitch together. She cradles the rest of the bottle in her hands, stares at the floorboard as if she's done something wrong.

“I’m sorry,” she suddenly murmurs, and it’s like her voice is caught in her throat, “I’m sorry that I... Didn’t ever really reach out to you... After the baby...”

“It wasn’t a baby.”

“It w— Fair enough.” Stacy frowns. “I’m just not... Good at stuff like that. At least with you. We don’t really... You know. I just didn’t really know what to say.”

A small part of you feels relieved to have the elephant in the room finally addressed head on, but that part of you is deafened by the horror of being reminded of your husband. The confines of this vehicle, sitting here with the only person who knows how to pretend to accept who you are; it was supposed to be an escape. Running here after all that you saw only made sense, a means to distract yourself from the waking nightmare of before— only now, to your dismay, you can’t stop thinking about what things were like before the rug was ripped out beneath your feet.

Two pink lines on a stick of white plastic, and Richard was putty in your hands. He was always smiling, always pulling his lips into a grin when he held the swell of your belly beneath his fingers. You looked so much farther along than you were, and he’d joke about how it only meant she was just that excited to come out and meet her new parents. Thick glasses fogged up at the frames, tears in his eyes when it was time for the shower; and you, so at odds with all that was happening around you.

It was like something was missing inside of you that your husband could never begin to understand, and even when your nightgown had turned red beneath your sheets, all you had felt was *cold*.

“You didn’t have to say anything.” You assure your friend, between tiny swigs from the vodka. “It was fine— It *is* fine... And then tomorrow, when I get these stupid... stretch marks off of me, and all this stupid loose skin... I’ll look even better than I ever did before.”

Stacy’s staring at you again now. You can feel the heat of her eyes on the side of your face like flames lapping at the curve of your eye socket, but for some reason you know better than to turn your body

to look at her.

A sigh falls out from behind her swollen lips, and she leans forward suddenly to rummage through her purse for what you're certain has to be the cigarettes she always craves whenever she starts to get drunk. Virginia Slims; they've always been her favorite because they make her feel reckless and elegant all at once. When she pulls out the half-empty pack you hold out your palm to ask for one as well.

Stacy readies to drop one in your hand, but for some reason she hesitates.

“You have surgery tomorrow,” she points out.

“So what?”

“So when I got my nose done they asked me a thousand times if I ever smoked— and I said ‘no’ because I hadn’t started yet... Gotta be a reason why they prod you about it so much before surgery.”

You roll your eyes and take the cigarette anyway, enjoying the taste when you place it between your lips. Stacy graciously lights it for you with the expensive gold lighter you’re always forgetting to ask her about, and she rolls down the windows just a couple of inches more.

“Hopefully I’ll just die while I’m under,” You mumble darkly, before catching the extent of what you’ve just said aloud.

Stacy’s eyes widen with concern, brows furrowing as if you’ve never said anything like this to her before. As if it isn’t a habit by now, a running joke that you don’t remember ever starting. You follow her gaze to the bite-mark on your hand before suddenly pulling it back up into the sleeve of your dress to keep it hidden.

“Everyone has to die sometime.” You explain with a shrug. “Might as well be while I’m not awake to feel it.”

A deep puff of smoke expels from Stacy’s cheeks, and she flicks the ash from her cigarette down onto the concrete of the parking lot below.

“I knew something was wrong.” She divulges, and turns all the way

in her seat so that her body faces the side of you. “What is it? Richie use you for another one of his stupid little jokes? Flirt around with some dumb blonde again after a show?”

Your mouth opens suddenly, and then clamps back shut without answering. You’re too afraid to tell her anything about what happened this morning, not even only in part. It’s almost like there’s a power welded to that clown’s very name, and that even hinting around it will send it heading straight towards you in the flesh to devour you both.

Warmth rushes to your cheeks; humiliation, anger, and fear all melding into one on your face, and just like that Stacy knows that whatever it is, it definitely looks like betrayal.

“That bastard,” she hisses, and you can see in her eyes that the hatred isn’t merely for show. She feigns out a soft gag, pulling her lips back over her teeth in disgust.

She’s never liked Richie, never been fond of his attitude or his vulgar, incessant mouth. There’s always been a wall there between them, one you could never break down even if you cared about them getting along enough to try.

“Guess that’s just the price of marrying rich men old enough to be our fathers.” Stacy adds ruefully, and it catches you off guard. “They use you, they abuse you, and as soon as the novelty wears off they look for something even younger to warm up their beds when you’re gone.” She holds her hands together and pulls her knees up even closer to her chest.

By now the sun is shining once more, the blazing heat of it refracting through the windshield of Stacy’s car. There are no clouds anymore, as far as you can see; only a sky so gaping wide it feels like you may fall right into it if you drink anymore. You’ll both have to go soon; back to your lives, and back to husbands who hardly even notice when you’re there. This safe, intoxicating little world you’ve both built will shatter like ice, and you’ll no longer be able to pretend that the other shoe isn’t going to drop right on your skull.

“Why do they do it?” You ask, surprising yourself with how heartfelt

you sound. “What do they gain? And what does it... even *mean*? ”

Stacy pauses for a while. She closes the cap to the bottle of booze, but never once looks away from sky.

“Mark took me to an art museum on our third date,” she begins, and though her words are slurred her voice is clear as glass, “He just kept... *explaining* everything to me, like I was nine years old... I even brought up my art education degree a few times just to make a point and he just... didn’t even care. It was almost like...” You watch Stacy’s throat as she swallows. “I don’t know. It was almost like *I was the woman , he was the man* ; and I was supposed to shut my mouth and just listen... I think they like being older than us. I think the age-gap makes them feel smarter than they are. I think we make them feel important, and special; but that at the end of the day... We really don’t mean a goddamn thing to either of them.”

She turns to look at you again, with her silken hair lying out of place and her kohl eyeliner smudged at the wing.

Sad, you think, as you trace the chartreuse rings of her irises. Beautiful, but so profoundly sad.

It’s never been a secret between the two of you, just how trapped you both truly feel. You’re always hiding, always biding the time waiting for the men in your lives to show you that they care; but you don’t know if all that she’s just said is truly fair at all.

Sure, Mark is no saint of a man; but Stacy knew that from the start. He wanted someone young, and shiny, and smart enough to know what her place would be by his side; and he wore that mantra on his sleeve like it was gilded there. She didn’t fall into her trap the way that you did. Stacy built hers on her own.

“Guess that’s why he fucks coeds when he thinks I’m staying at my parents.” Stacy’s sudden comment catches you wholly off guard, makes you curl up your nose in shock and disgust.

“Jesus. You know, that’s— That’s really fucking gross..”

“To *you*.” She quips, rolling her eyes and fixing her hair in the

rearview mirror. “Always such a prude...”

“Richie was my first.” You answer, because in your drunken mind it only makes sense.

Stacy turns her head suddenly towards you as if you’d just reached out your arm to slap her across the face, and you wonder for a moment if you’ve ever told her that before now. You never talk about sex aloud with Stacy, and to be fair, you never talk about sex aloud at all. The thought of being open and candid about that part of your life makes you shudder, makes you pull your lips back over your teeth with distaste.

You expect Stacy to try and press on, but instead she just shakes her head and stares blankly down at her lap. There’s anger on her face, dull and faint, and you wonder for a moment if it’s what you said that put it there.

“Yeah, well, you were still a fucking teenager whenever he married you... So I guess I’m not really that surprised.”

“I was nineteen years old.” You correct, a bit more indignantly than you’d meant. “I’d hardly call that a teenager.”

Stacy opens her mouth, and then bites down hard on the tip of her tongue. You can see the muscle in her jaw clenching and unclenching beneath the veil of her makeup, and at last she sighs and leans back in her seat.

“Men...” She curses, and makes a faint clicking sound with her mouth. “It could be a lot worse for us though, I guess.”

You cock your head to the side, unsure of what she’s hinting at.

“Well for one, we could both be in the same boat as Kellan... You know Kellan— from my New Year’s Eve party? *Her* husband cheated on her with a *man*. ”

The roof of your mouth goes suddenly dry. You can feel your heart thudding in your chest, panic welling up like a poisonous fog in your lungs.

"Does that—" You close your eyes for a minute, trying desperately to calm yourself down. "Does that mean that he's gay?"

Stacy shoots you a curious look.

"Not necessarily..." She shrugs. "But it certainly means he's not straight."

A stone drops at the pit of your stomach, and even though you knew this was something you'd have to face, it doesn't make the pill any easier for you to swallow.

There have always been whispers, always supermarket tabloids so outrageous they'd make your eyes roll back into your head; only now they don't seem all that outrageous to you anymore. All those lingering embraces with that freckle-faced friend from his childhood and trips back to his hometown of Maine; it's like they're all playing in your mind like faded pictures projected on a screen. A phone turned face down onto the tablecloth at dinner, sheets as cold as ice when you reach your arm out at night, and the way he closes his eyes when the two of you make love. All those things you thought were innocent have now been peppered with the sting of paranoia, and you can't help but gasp when you ask yourself the most terrible question of all: Just how many men has Richard slept with since the two of you both said "I do?"

Nothing calms you, not even the vodka. All you can do now is sit here board-stiff; screaming in your head but unable to part your lips to let it out. Surely it isn't true. Surely he once loved you, once wanted you; even if he doesn't anymore. It can't be just that he's lied to you from the start; all those memories of his hands on your body and his tongue in your mouth—he *wanted* you.

He wanted you, you repeat, chanting it over and over in your head. *He wanted you, he wanted you, he wanted you.*

"I think the liquor's really starting to catch up to me." Stacy suddenly blurts out, and you're painfully unaware that she senses the odd energy that's slowly filling up the confines of the car. "I think I'm just uh... Gonna lean back and take a nap until I'm sober enough to head home."

“Y-yeah.” You nod, awkwardly. “I uh... I should probably head back home too... You know... Address things with Richie head on...”

“You sure you don’t wanna wait for me to drive you back?”

You tell her, “No,” but the offer felt empty either way.

You aren’t wasted; and in fact you’ve walked home before far more inebriated than this, but it doesn’t stop your knees from trembling as you try to climb down from the seat of her car. Grabbing all your things and checking a thousand times to make sure you haven’t forgotten your keys again, you turn and you amble back down the streets to your home.

Home, you consider. You wonder if that’s truly what it is to you anymore, or if you’ll walk in to see that that thing has taken your place. You wonder if it’ll look different to you now; stained with eldritch horror and a lover’s wicked betrayal, or if it’ll be just as unfamiliar to you now as it ever was before. Either way, you’re drunk enough to feel as if the only thing that matters right now is getting back to your house.

Your mind focuses on the importance of making it to your surgery tomorrow, and having the chance to rest before preparing yourself for the anxiety and the pain that’s sure to come along with it. The danger of what you could possibly be walking yourself into doesn’t matter, nor does the fact that only just this morning you bore witness to your husband sleeping with a being that shouldn’t even exist. All you have to do is just make it home.

Soaked and dripping with sweat, by the time you make it back to the gate you wish you could just rip your clothes right off of you before you even pass through. It salts your skin and dampens the fabric of your dress, rubbing raw the length of your body. A quick glimpse of yourself in the enormous window of your house, and you suddenly pray that no one around you recognizes just who you are.

You stumble through the imposing front door on ankles that wobble like a newborn calf, heels catching and nearly toppling you forward on the stairs. It occurs to you vaguely that Pennywise could still very likely be here, and just as you pass through the living room you

suddenly—

The sight of your husband stops you dead in your tracks.

He's sitting dead in the center of your perfect white sofa, his head cradled gently in his hands. His limbs are stiff and still, like a statue carved right into the cushions. He hasn't moved for a while, you can see it in how slowly he straightens back up to look at you. Richie looks at you, only *looks at you*, and your heart breaks for yourself all over again.

This man who doesn't love you the way that you thought that he would, who has hurt you far worse than you ever imagined he was capable of doing; and you know you'd rather die than ever leave him. It takes everything you have not to just fall to the floor in defeat, to not mourn the loss of yourself with a sob.

Richie runs his fingers through his unkempt hair, brushing back a stray curl over the breadth of his forehead. Those big, round eyes glisten in the light; just on the verge of tears without letting them spill over onto his cheeks. He looks so young to you like this, so frightened and filled with unspoken regret. His mouth opens and closes about a hundred times altogether, lips raw and red from being chewed between his teeth, and it's the first time in your life that you've ever seen him speechless.

“Is it gone?”

He nods his head quickly in answer, small jerking movements that almost look desperate.

“Do you love it?” You ask suddenly, without even warning yourself first. “Do you love *Pennywise*?”

“No.” Richie answers.

“Do you love me?”

“Yes.” Richie answers.

“Then when?”

Your husband's dark brows knit together, the line in his forehead scrunching up like a wrinkled page in an old book. He doesn't understand what you mean, and you suppose it was stupid of you to have expected him to.

"When," you reiterate, and your face runs hot with tears, "did I ever stop being enough?"

He stands from his seat in an instant. You watch him through the blur of your vision and the swaying of your body on your feet, as he wraps his arms around you and pulls you in close to his chest.

Nothing is different, and nothing has changed from this morning. You didn't grow, or learn anything profound by running through the doors with your mascara steaming black down your cheeks. You were always going to come back here down on your knees; drunk on vodka, and on love, and too desperate to think about the stench of the sewer still lingering on his clothes.

Author's Note:

For the sake of this fic, Pennywise is in fact able to travel outside of Derry but he isn't as powerful when he does because this is a fanfic and I can do whatever I want including making him Richie Tozier's secret lover you can't stop me there is no God here to observe this